DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 165 071 CG 013 168

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TITLE Adolescents' Perceptions of Teachers' Caring and Achievement Press Related to Sex, Track, Program, and Achievement.
PUB DATE Oct 78
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northeastern Educational Research Association (Ellenville, New York, October, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Achievement Need; Adolescents; *Affective Behavior; Classroom Environment; Expectation; High Achievers; *Low Achievement Factors; Research Projects; Student Attitudes; *Student Teacher Relationship; *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A group of 3,000 7th through 12th graders were surveyed to investigate their perceptions of how much teachers cared about them and the degree to which they felt teachers urged them to achieve. Of the adolescents surveyed, 39% felt that teachers never or rarely seem to care about them. This is a crucial dimension, since teacher warmth has been shown to be relevant to achievement. The differences with respect to student characteristics were not as great as expected, considering previous research on how teacher expectations and attitudes vary. Although teachers are thought to have lower expectations for students in the lower tracks, from the students' point of view there was little difference in pressure to achieve among the various academic groupings. At the same time, it is of some concern that the lower-achieving students did not report that teachers care about them to the same degree as the better students did. (BN)

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ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS' CARING AND ACHIEVEMENT PRESS RELATED TO SEX, TRACK, PROGRAM AND ACHIEVEMENT

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Paper Presented at the Northeastern Educational Research Association Annual Meeting
Ellenville, New York, October, 1978

CG013168

Adolescents' Perceptions of Teachers' Caring and Achievement Press Related to Sex, Track, Program and Achievement*

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The purpose of this study was to investigate adolescents' perceptions of how much teachers cared about them and the degree to which teachers urged them to achieve. This is an extension of two lines of previous research. First, perceived caring is another dimension of children's attitudes toward school and teachers, studies of which have dealt with liking, satisfaction, etc. Second, research on teacher expectations has found differences in teacher attitudes and behavior with respect to such variables as social class, sex, ability, etc. It is our purpose here to examine student perceptions of teachers in terms of characteristics that have previously been found to result in varying expectancies for achievement.

In a review of student attitudes, Jackson (1968) concluded that while most students like school, a significant number are dissatisfied. However, he suggested that finer distinctions need be made when examining this topic and that perceptions of teachers should be examined in addition to views toward school itself. Studies have shown that girls are more likely than boys to report that teachers like them (Davidson and Lang, 1960) or to see teachers as friendly (Lahaderne in Jackson, 1968). Satisfaction with school has not been found to be related to pupils' performance (Jackson, 1968). But, since teacher warmth is generally related to achievement (Rosenshine and Furst, 1971), the investigation of students' perceptions of teachers' caring would appear to be a relevant dimension of this topic of attitudes.

Rather than to study expectations directly, our concern was to focus on students' perceptions of teachers and not the teachers' behaviors and attitudes themselves. We are suggesting that the students' definition of their situation warrants such attention, following the perspective of W. I. Thomas, "If men define things as real, they are real in their consequences (1928, p. 81)." By combining students' perceptions, we obtain a measure of the perceived environment. This "social-ecological" approach developed by Trickett, "uses the pooled perceptions of environmental members to define the setting (1978, p. 408)."

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* Collection of the data for this research was supported by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (MH-23542) to Bernard C. Rosen, Cornell University, principal investigator.

Studies of how teacher behavior reflects expectancies points to the differential treatment of the sexes, students of differing abilities and achievement, and varied personalities. Inequality among teacher-student interactions has been amply demonstrated by much research (Brophy and Good, 1974). But, as Moore, et al. (1973) have pointed out, children must see the messages as credible if the self-fulfilling prophecy is to occur. The present analysis will therefore focus on student perceptions of teachers as related to individual (achievement), social (sex and social class) and organizational (academic groupings) characteristics.

METHOD

Sample. A questionnaire was administered to 3000 7th through 12th graders in three school districts in the southern tier of New York State. These communities were contiguous and had populations of 64,000, 28,000 and 20,000. One-third of the students in each track (honors, regents, non-regents) participated while in their English classes following a stratified sampling design. Equal numbers of males and females took part.

Measures. Included in the questionnaire were two items: "How often do you find teachers showing that they care about you?" and "How often do you find teachers pushing you to do well?" Alternative responses were: 'never,' 'rarely,' 'sometimes' and 'often.' The three measures related to academic performance were scholastic aptitude (intelligence) test scores, achievement test scores and classroom grade average. Students were asked what grades they had received in the past year. To validate the self-report of academic performance, actual grades for 27% of the sample were obtained. The correlation between self-reported performance and actual grade point average was .77. Standardized scholastic aptitude and achievement test scores were obtained from the central offices of the school districts. The scholastic aptitude measure consisted of the scores from the California Test of Mental Maturity (CTMM), the Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test (OLMAT), and the Differential Aptitude Test (DAT), depending on the school district. Since the CTMM and OLMAT already had means of 100 and standard deviations of 16, the DAT was standardized to this mean and standard deviation. The achievement test measure was standardized in a similar fashion from scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, Iowa Test of Basic Skills and Iowa Test of Educational

Development. Track was determined by placement in the English classes. Students reported their own program as academic/college preparatory or vocational/occupational/business. Social class ranking was determined by father's occupation, or the mother's if the father was absent, using Hollingshead's classificatory system of occupations (1957).

RESULTS

Table 1 indicates students' responses to the question about teachers caring about them. It is striking that 39% of the adolescents reported

Table 1

"In this school, how often do you find teachers showing that they care about you?" (percentages rounded to nearest whole.)

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)
Total sample(n=3036)	8%	31%	48%	13%
Males only (n=1537)	9%	31%	49%	12%
Females only(n=1499)	7%	31%	48%	14%

	$\bar{x}$	s.d.	
Males	2.65	.80	t = 2.2 n.s.
Females	2.69	.80	

that teachers never or rarely showed that they cared about the students.

Average teacher caring was then compared to track placement, type of school program and social class status of the student. Table 2 indicates a low significant trend that the higher the track, the more likely it is that students see teachers as caring. There is a very significant difference with regard to school program such that academic students perceive greater teacher caring than do the non-academic students. Finally, there is no relationship between social class standing and perceived caring.

Table 2

Perceived Teacher Caring by Track, Program and Social Class

	$\bar{x}$	s.d.	statistic	significance
Track				
Honors	2.76	.74		
Regents	2.69	.77	F = 4.14	p<.02
Non-regents	2.60	.84		
Program				
Academic	2.76	.73	t = 21.7	p<.001
Vocational,etc.	2.57	.77		
Social Class			r = .01	n.s.

Table 3 shows the relationship of perceived teacher caring with the three achievement measures. The relationship is strongest with teachers' grades and less significant with the standardized test measures.

Table 3

Perceived Teacher Caring and Achievement

Caring correlated with	Correlation	Significance
Teachers' grades	.13	p<.001
Scholastic Aptitude	.05	p<.01
Achievement Test	.04	p<.05

Students' responses to the question on teachers pushing them to do well are shown in Table 4. Over one-third of the adolescents report that teachers never or rarely push them to do well. This appears to be a significant proportion even if some part of this group are truly self-motivated. Unexpectedly, there was no sex difference in the average responses.

Table 4

"In this school, how often do you find teachers pushing you to do well in school?" (percentages rounded to nearest whole.)

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)
Total sample(n=3042)	10%	26%	42%	22%
Males only (n=1537)	9%	26%	43%	22%
Females only(n=1505)	11%	26%	42%	22%

	$\bar{x}$	s.d.		
Males	2.79	.88	t = 2.5	n.s.
Females	2.74	.92		

This press to do well was broken down by track, program and social class, as shown in Table 5. There is no significant difference among the track groupings and only slight relationship for school program. The correla- with social class is significant though of a small magnitude.

Table 5

Achievement Press by Track, Program and Social Class

	$\bar{x}$	s.d.	statistic	significance
Track				
Honors	2.75	.86		
Regents	2.73	.90	F = 2.17	n.s.
Non-regents	2.83	.87		
Program				
Academic	2.74	.87	t = 2.92	p<.10
Vocational, etc.	2.82	.87		
Social Class			r = -.05	p<.005

Table 6 shows the correlation of achievement press with the academic achievement measures. The negative correlation between press and grades indicates that students who do not do as well in school receive greater pressure from teachers to achieve. The stronger relationship with grades than with either of the two standardized tests might indicate that teachers rely more on immediate performance than with external scores, a finding related to some of the techniques used to induce teacher expectancies.

Table 6

Perceived Achievement Press and Achievement

Press correlated with	Correlation	Significance
Teachers' grades	-.11	p<.001
Scholastic Aptitude	-.06	p<.005
Achievement Test	-.06	p<.005

Much of the literature on childrearing techniques and their effect on achievement points to the desirability of both warmth and pressure when encouraging achievement. Therefore, Table 7 shows the level of academic performance for low and high levels of caring and achievement press. The

Table 7

Average Teachers' Grades

Perceived Achievement Press	Perceived Caring: Low*	Perceived Caring: High**
Low*	4.5	5.0
High**	4.2	4.6

F = 25.00
p<.001

*Low is never or rarely. **High is sometimes or often.

range of grades that comprise the average is from 8 ("mostly A's") to 1 ("mostly F's"). Average achievement is highest for students who perceive a high level of caring from teachers and little teacher pressure to do well. (With high grades, there may be little reason to be pushed to achieve.) Those students who perceive a great deal of pressure to achieve yet do not see teachers as caring are the lowest in average performance. The "low-low" and "high-high" cells are similar in achievement and fall in the middle range of achievement. It is interesting to note that these middle achievers see low caring and low pressure to achieve OR high caring and high pressure to achieve.

Summary and Conclusions

The relationship of teacher caring and achievement press with the other variables are summarized in the table below.

Table 8
Summary

Student Characteristic	Teacher Caring		Achievement Press	
Sex	t = 2.2	n.s.	t = 2.5	n.s.
Track	F = 4.1	p<.02	F = 2.2	n.s.
Program	t = 21.7	p<.001	t = 2.9	p<.10
Social Class	r = .01	n.s.	r = -.05	p<.005
Academic Performance				
Teachers' Grades	r = .13	p<.001	r = -.11	p<.001
Aptitude Test	r = .05	p<.01	r = -.06	p<.005
Achievement Test	r = .04	p<.05	r = -.06	p<.005

The major findings are:

1. Thirty-nine percent of the students reported that teachers never or rarely cared about them.
2. Thiry-six percent of the students reported that teachers never or rarely pushed them to do well in school.
3. Students who receive higher grades from teachers perceive them as more caring.
4. Students in academic programs feel that teachers care more about them than do the students in vocational/commercial curricula.

5. Girls and boys are about equal in their perceptions of teachers as caring. Neither is there any sex difference in pressure to achieve.
6. There is no relationship between social class background and perception of teachers as caring.
7. Students who receive lower teacher grades report significantly greater teacher pressure to achieve.
8. Perceived pressure to achieve does not vary significantly with respect to track or program.
9. Academic performance is lowest among those students who report little teacher caring yet high pressure to achieve.

It appears striking that 39% of these adolescents felt that teachers never or rarely seem to care about them. This is a crucial dimension since teacher warmth has been shown to be related to achievement. The differences with respect to student characteristics were not as great as we expected to find considering previous research on how teacher expectancies and attitudes vary. Much of the research on the validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy studies has focused on the teachers' interpretation of 'contrived' information or scores external to the everyday processes of the classroom. Teachers are said to have lower expectations for the lower tracks or ability groups. From the student's point of view, there appears to be little difference in pressure to achieve among the various academic groupings. At the same time, we should be concerned that the lower achieving students do not report that teachers care about them to the same degree as the better students.

The interaction of teacher warmth and pressure to achieve was demonstrated using average grades. Students who achieve well in school with little teacher pressure see their teachers as very caring. High pressure to achieve without much teacher caring is associated with the lowest level of achievement. The combinations of low-caring/low-pressure and high-caring/high pressure are characteristic of the middle-range achievers. High pressure to achieve without teacher warmth appears to lend itself to the poorest academic performance on the part of the students. (However, we must recognize that these students may also be the ones who do not wish to "relate" to their instructors.)

We recognize the speculative nature of this study due to the limitations of using a small number of questions. The findings point to the need for

further research investigating the students' perspective as related to teacher warmth and pressure to achieve. In attempting to measure the perceived environment of the adolescent, we hope to better understand the more immediate influences upon academic performance.

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